

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY - REGION 9

June 6, 2001

FACT SHEET

**Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to:
Split the Searles Valley, California
Particulate Matter (PM-10) nonattainment area into
three, separate nonattainment areas and find that two of the
areas failed to attain the federal PM-10 air quality standard.**

Today's Proposed Action

- EPA is today proposing actions affecting the Searles Valley, California PM-10 nonattainment area which is located in the rural, CA high desert and includes portions of Inyo, Kern, and San Bernardino Counties.
- EPA is proposing to split the Searles Valley PM-10 nonattainment area into three, separate nonattainment areas: Coso Junction, Indian Wells Valley, and Trona.
- EPA is also proposing to find that the portions of the Searles Valley associated with the proposed Coso Junction and Indian Wells Valley nonattainment areas failed to attain the federal PM-10 (dust) air quality standards by December 31, 1994, the Clean Air Act (CAA) attainment deadline for moderate PM-10 areas designated nonattainment under the 1990 CAA Amendments. In addition, EPA is proposing to find that the Trona area attained the PM-10 standards by that date.
- If finalized, the finding will trigger a reclassification of the proposed Coso Junction and Indian Wells Valley from moderate to serious nonattainment and the development of a new air quality plan for both areas including upgrading strategies to control sources of PM10.
- Today's proposed rulemaking is, in part, a response to a lawsuit brought by Sierra Club and the Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc., seeking to compel EPA to determine whether certain nonattainment areas had attained the 1-hour ozone or PM-10 federal air quality standards by their applicable Clean Air Act attainment deadline.

Air Quality in the Searles Valley

- Even though air quality in the Searles Valley is very good for the majority of the year, neither Coso Junction or Indian Wells Valley recorded the requisite three consecutive years of clean and complete air quality data necessary for EPA to find that an area has attained the federal PM-10 standards. During the years 1992-1994, Coso Junction monitored exceedances of the PM-10 standards, and Indian Wells Valley recorded only four of the twelve complete quarters of ambient data required under EPA's regulations.

- EPA also reviewed 1998-2000 monitoring data to determine whether Coso Junction and Indian Wells Valley would qualify for redesignation to attainment in lieu of the proposed finding of failure to attain. Unfortunately, both areas monitored at least one exceedance in 1998 and thus do not qualify for redesignation at this time. If either area avoids recording an exceedance during 2001, it could qualify for redesignation to attainment.
- The Searles Valley PM-10 covers approximately 2,000 square miles. The Navy's China Lake Naval Air Warfare Station encompasses approximately 50% of the nonattainment area land mass.

Particulate Matter and Public Health

- In the Searles Valley nonattainment area, elevated PM-10 levels can result from disturbance of soils by wind and human activity.
- Many scientific studies have linked breathing PM to a series of significant health problems, including: aggravated asthma, increases in respiratory symptoms difficult or painful breathing, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, and premature death. PM is also associated with increased hospital emissions and emergency room visits for people with heart and lung disease, absences from work and school, and reduced visibility.

Opportunity for Public Comment on Today's Proposal

- EPA will take public comment on this proposal for 60 days following publication in the Federal Register. Comments should be sent by mail or e-mail to the contact listed below.
- If after public notice and comment EPA finalizes this proposal:
 - R the Searles Valley nonattainment area would be split into the Coso Junction, Indian Wells Valley, and Trona PM-10 nonattainment areas;
 - R the Coso Junction and Indian Wells Valley nonattainment areas would be reclassified to serious and would need to develop new attainment plans and upgrade current air pollution control strategies, and
 - R the Trona area would be eligible for redesignation to attainment of the PM-10 standards.

Further Information

- A copy of the proposal will be available in the Air Programs section of EPA Region 9's website, <http://www.epa.gov/region09/air/> within the next few days.
- For more information, please contact John Ungvarsky, U.S. EPA Region 9, Air Planning Office, at 415-744-1286; ungvarsky.john@epa.gov.